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TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *TM*

JAN 21 1964

INTELLIGENCE NOTE: SOVIETS CRITICIZE U-2 OVERFLIGHTS OF CUBA

A Rare Reference. A Soviet radio commentary yesterday on Castro's USSR visit and events in Panama charged that from Howard Air Force Base in Panama "every morning...U-2 planes take off and spy on Cuba from a high altitude." The most recent of the hitherto very infrequent Soviet public references to overflights of Cuba appeared in the Soviet leaders' New Year's message to their Cuban counterparts. In it they expressed support for Castro's five demands, including cessation of intrusions into Cuban waters and air space. We have no recollection of an explicit Soviet public reference to U-2 overflights since the Caribbean crisis in October-November 1962.

Bolster Panama Case Against US. The Soviet charge adds to the case Moscow has been making recently against the US for alleged illegal use of Panamanian territory, and could indicate intent to use it at the UN when and if the substance of Panamanian grievances is aired there. Other Soviet charges, which mesh neatly with Khrushchev's letter on peaceful settlement of territorial disputes, accuse the US of alienating and exploiting Panamanian territory, and of maintaining military-training bases there for suppression of "liberation" struggles in Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

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Deter US Overflights. Public criticism of US overflights of Cuba could also be designed to deter aerial surveillance of Cuba which is no doubt resented by Castro and a source of friction in Soviet-Cuban relations. Moscow might be particularly eager for such overflights to cease as it moves toward a turnover of the SAM system to the Cubans. In addition, if a propaganda campaign against US overflights now develops, it may be designed to prepare the ground for an attempt to bring down a U-2 in the hopes of inducing the US to desist from further aerial surveillance of Cuba.

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